

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING  
IN THE HUNTSVILLE URBANIZED AREA**



***HUNTSVILLE AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY (HATS)***

**Prepared by the Huntsville Planning Division in cooperation with the  
Bureau of Transportation Planning, Alabama Department of Transportation**

**ADOPTED February 27, 2008**



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## **GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS**

The following abbreviations may appear in this document and are commonly used by the MPO when communicating transportation plans and initiatives to the public.

ADA - Americans with Disabilities Act  
ALDOT - Alabama Department of Transportation  
CAC - Citizens Advisory Committee  
CMS - Congestion Management System  
CN - Construction  
EIS - Environmental Impact Statement  
FHWA - Federal Highway Administration  
FONSI - Finding of no Significant Impact  
FTA - Federal Transit Administration  
GIS - Geographical Information Systems  
HATS - Huntsville Area Transportation Study  
ISTEA - Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (1991)  
ITS - Intelligent Transportation Systems  
LRTP - Long Range Transportation Plan  
MPO - Metropolitan Planning Organization  
PE - Preliminary Engineering  
PIP - Public Involvement Plan  
PS&E - Plans, Specifications, and Estimates  
RW - Right of Way  
SAFETEA - Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003  
STIP - State Transportation Improvement Program  
TCC - Technical Coordinating Committee  
TEA-21 - Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
TIP - Transportation Improvement Program  
UPWP - Unified Planning Work Program

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**HUNTSVILLE AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY  
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN FOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING  
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**I. PURPOSE**

This Public Participation Plan (PPP) is intended to provide guidelines for public participation activities to be conducted by the Huntsville Area MPO. This plan complies with the U.S. Department of Transportation rules requiring provisions to ensure early and continuing public participation in the development of transportation plans and programs for the Huntsville Area Transportation Study. This plan also ensures that identified Federal, State, local, and non-profit agencies and organizations responsible for plans that may be impacted by transportation planning activities are consulted and included in the public participation process, specifically during the development of the metropolitan transportation plan and the TIP.

**II. INTRODUCTION**

**A. Legal Authority**

The Federal Highway Act of 1962 required all urbanized areas with a population of 50,000 or more to establish a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive (3C) planning process in order to be eligible to receive funding from the U.S. Department of Transportation. This process was further addressed in the 1974 Federal Aid Highway Act, which stipulated that all urbanized areas required to have a 3C planning process also create local Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO).

**B. History and Composition of the Huntsville Area MPO**

An updated agreement concerning a transportation planning process for the Huntsville Urbanized Area was executed in January 1995 by Madison County; the cities of Huntsville, Madison, Triana, and Owens Cross Roads; the Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments; and the Alabama Department of Transportation. Representatives from these governmental entities comprise the local MPO. Membership of the MPO consists of the following members:

- Chairman of the Madison County Commission
- Mayor of Huntsville
- City Council Member of Huntsville
- Mayor of Madison
- Mayor of Owens Cross Roads

- Mayor of Triana
- Division Engineer for the Alabama Department of Transportation
- Executive Director, Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments (non-voting)
- Division Administrator for the Federal Highway Administration (non-voting)
- Transportation Planning Engineer for the Alabama Department of Transportation (non-voting)

MPO meetings are called when necessary to adopt or amend transportation plans. Meetings are generally held on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of the City of Huntsville Municipal Building at 4:00 pm, typically on a Wednesday. The MPO does not act arbitrarily, but is governed by specific by-laws. A quorum must be in attendance to vote upon issues that are presented before the group. Additionally, the MPO receives public input and advisement before voting on transportation plans. The MPO is advised by two committees: The Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) and the Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC). The Technical Coordinating Committee and Citizens' Advisory Committee meet as called. Meetings are generally held on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of the City of Huntsville Municipal Building. Typically, the Technical Coordinating Committee meets at 3:30 pm, prior to the prescheduled Wednesday 4:00 pm meeting of the MPO. The Citizens' Advisory Committee typically meets at 5:00 pm on the Monday during the same week as the scheduled MPO meeting. These two committees provide input to transportation planning issues prior to MPO deliberations; however, the MPO is the final body that has legal authority to approve transportation plans and plan amendments.

#### **1. Technical Coordinating Committee**

The Technical Coordinating Committee is comprised of technical personnel of operating agencies represented on the MPO, and other agencies (including private, when and if applicable) responsible for or affected by implementation of the transportation plans and programs. Members of the committee are appointed by the MPO.

According to the by-laws of the TCC, their functions and duties are as follows:

- To analyze and recommend technical methods, procedures and standards to further the transportation planning process.
- To help coordinate work of operating departments and agencies participating in the study.
- To recommend alternate transportation plans and programs to the MPO.



## 2. **Citizens' Advisory Committee**

The 1995 agreement concerning the transportation planning process in the Huntsville Urbanized Area includes provisions for public involvement through a representative Citizens' Advisory Committee. This Committee is tasked with the following responsibilities:

- Review and respond to local transportation plans prepared for the area.
- Assess the local areawide transportation and transportation related needs as perceived by area residents.
- Initiate actions related to providing area residents the opportunity to input individual, group, private, and semi-private ideas, suggestions, needs, and concepts for consideration and recommendation to the Metropolitan Planning Organization and/or the Technical Coordinating Committee.
- Objectively assess the social, economic, and physical impact within the area of all transportation plans submitted by the Metropolitan Planning Organization or Technical Coordinating Committee.
- Assist the transportation planning staff, where possible, in the development of specific program solutions to areawide needs as identified through community research and public meetings.

The by-laws of the Citizens' Advisory Committee provide for the committee membership to be composed of 16 members appointed by the officials of local government who serve on the Metropolitan Planning Organization. The membership of the committee is composed of the following:

Eight (8) representatives from the City of Huntsville  
Two (2) representatives from Madison County  
Two (2) representatives from the City of Madison  
Two (2) representatives from the City of Owens Cross Roads  
Two (2) representatives from the Town of Triana

The CAC meetings provide a public forum for citizens to provide input to the transportation planning process. Public announcements of CAC meetings are provided to newspapers of general circulation, radio, and television stations within the study area, inviting the participation of the general public in the meetings.

### **C. Other Public Participation Requirements**

In addition to the Citizens' Advisory Committee, the local MPO involves the general public in transportation planning activities through a variety of strategies. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in any program receiving federal assistance, and local MPOs must follow those provisions.

Furthermore, federal regulation 23 CFR 450.316 requires MPOs to develop and use a documented participation plan that defines a process of providing reasonable opportunities for the general public as well as transportation users and providers among various modes, to be involved in the metropolitan planning process.

Additionally, the federal regulation requires that the participation plan be developed by the MPO in consultation with all interested parties and shall, at a minimum, describe explicit procedures, strategies, and desired outcomes.

It is based upon these requirements that the Huntsville Area MPO maintains a public participation program.

## **III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCEDURES**

### **A. Overview**

The local MPO is required by federal legislation to develop and adopt a Long Range Transportation Plan or metropolitan transportation plan, a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), a Unified Planning Work Program, and a Congestion Management Plan. It shall be the policy of the MPO to conduct public involvement activities before these major plans are to be submitted for formal adoption to the MPO.

This Public Participation Plan (PPP) is intended to provide various techniques which may be implemented when conducting public involvement activities. The PPP also details the specific goals and policies of the MPO for public participation in the planning process.

Public involvement or participation activities coordinated by the local MPO can be placed within the following five broad categories:

1. In accordance with MPO by-laws, regular and special business meetings of the MPO and its advisory committees are conducted in an open public forum with prior notification.
2. The development of the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Long Range Transportation Plan

(LRTP) or metropolitan transportation plan, Congestion Management Plan, and other major transportation policies, plans, or programs identified by the MPO, include opportunities for public comment prior to adoption by the MPO.

3. Individual transportation improvement projects have their own public involvement methods in place. An example would be conducting engineering design public hearings for road widening projects, and taking public comments during and preceding the public hearing.
4. Periodic updates of local MPO activities are available to the public in various ways, including the **Transportation Quarterly Review** newsletter, the official MPO website, and through available staff who may assist inquiring citizens in person, by phone, letter, or e-mail.
5. In order to eliminate or minimize conflicts with other agencies' plans that may impact transportation, consultation with appropriate Federal, State, local, and private agencies and organizations is included in the participation process, more specifically during the development of the metropolitan transportation plan and the TIP.

These five components serve as a general overview of public involvement within the MPO's jurisdiction. While the public participation process for transportation plans and programs shall continue to focus upon the activities of the Citizens' Advisory Committee, the MPO staff will also continue to take advantage of processes already in place to disseminate public information and encourage public participation.

## **B. Public Participation Techniques**

Public participation in planning activities is an on-going process for the MPO. Several techniques are employed on a routine basis to ensure that public involvement is successful. The public involvement and participation techniques listed in this section can be used for special events and for routine activities such as the TIP process and updating the metropolitan transportation plan. The list provided as follows presents a toolbox of techniques that may be utilized. The MPO may select a number of public involvement activities to be exercised during the inception and life of a project or program; however, there may be instances where some techniques may not be appropriate for all circumstances or instances where some techniques are required by federal legislation. The MPO staff must, at their discretion, select the most appropriate public involvement activities for each circumstance. All methods discussed below are currently used by the MPO, and include a description of the technique as well as the activities and outcomes promoted by each method.

1. **MPO Website:**

The MPO website, hosted by the City of Huntsville's Information Technology Department, was developed in 2001, and includes information about the MPO, membership of the committees, meeting times, and meeting agendas. The site also includes transportation planning publications that can be downloaded such as the TIP, UPWP, Long Range Transportation Plan (metropolitan transportation plan), Congestion Management System, City of Huntsville's Bike Plan, and Transportation Quarterly Review. The MPO website is routinely maintained and updated by the MPO staff. The website is used to promote MPO meetings and special public involvement meetings and public hearings. The site can also be used by the public to download specific published transportation plans and publications. The City of Huntsville's website contains a community bulletin board on its main page, and it has been utilized to announce public hearings and public involvement meetings. Persons can access the MPO website by visiting <http://www.hsvcity.com>, clicking on Departments, and selecting "Planning Services/Urban Development" or by clicking visiting the MPO website at [mpo.hsvcity.com](http://mpo.hsvcity.com).

2. **MPO Databases:**

The MPO staff maintains several databases of contacts which include MPO committee memberships; news media; local elected officials; appropriate Federal, State, local, and non-profit agencies and organizations; businesses; and civic organizations that desire to be informed of transportation issues. The databases include the names of individuals, mailing addresses, phone numbers, and in some instances e-mail addresses and fax numbers. The databases are used for MPO meeting notices, newsletter distribution, and other public participation processes as necessary. Citizens may, upon request be added to the appropriate database to either receive the quarterly newsletter, MPO meeting notices, or both. The databases are used to inform citizens of other public involvement activities per their request. The news media are faxed meeting notices of the MPO and are made aware of other public involvement activities. Federal land management agencies, as well as State and local agencies and organizations responsible for economic growth and development, environmental protection, airport operations, freight movement, land use management, natural resources, conservation, historic preservation, and human service transportation providers (including those nonprofits that receive federal assistance from sources other than the Department of Transportation for nonemergency transportation services), will be consulted during the development of the metropolitan transportation plan and the TIP. This will occur so that conflicts with other agencies' plans will be eliminated or minimized. Additionally, the database will be used to identify which entities should be involved in the environmental impact and mitigation portion of the metropolitan transportation plan.

3. **MPO Newsletter:**  
The MPO staff publishes a quarterly newsletter that is distributed to approximately 400 persons, businesses, media, municipalities, and other government agencies. Persons are added to the distribution list by request. Each issue of the newsletter includes the MPO website address, staff point of contact, articles concerning specific projects or meetings, a listing of authorized projects for the current fiscal year, the status of transportation projects for the current fiscal year, and a status of road construction activities. The MPO newsletter informs the public of the status of current and planned transportation projects, and promotes the MPOs' planning studies and other transportation publications.
4. **Press Releases:**  
Press releases are sent to local broadcast and print media, including minority publications, to announce MPO meetings and public involvement meetings. Press releases will be sent to announce meetings, public involvement meetings, and other MPO activities.
5. **Legal Ads:**  
Legal ads are placed in a local publication that has a wide circulation in the community. These ads are placed to announce MPO activities at the discretion of the MPO staff.
6. **Cable TV Announcements:**  
The City of Huntsville operates a government news channel through Comcast Cable Television. Information regarding regular MPO and Citizens Advisory Committee Meetings and other pertinent public information concerning MPO activities is provided to the City of Huntsville Mayor's office to be included in scrolling announcements displayed on the channel. The channel is available to Comcast Cable subscribers located in the City of Huntsville and in portions of Owens Cross Roads, Alabama. This method is used for regular meeting announcements and other pertinent public involvement activities administered by the MPO staff.
7. **Project-Specific Websites:**  
Project-specific websites may be used for individual projects or plans that are significant in scope. The site may be used when the project information is too extensive to be included on the MPOs' web page. The specific site can include meeting announcements, comment forms, project updates, and project team contact information. This is to be used for major planning studies and major MPO projects such as the metropolitan transportation plan or any other pertinent major planning activity.

8. **Project/Transportation Plan Open Houses:**  
The MPO staff conducts open and informal meetings for the public to ask questions and provide comments concerning certain major transportation plans, such as the metropolitan transportation plan and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). MPO staff members can interact with the public on a one-on-one basis at these meetings. Additionally, the Alabama Department of Transportation conducts "open house" type meetings and public hearings concerning the design of certain transportation projects and the development of the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The MPO staff attends these meetings as well, to support and supplement the State's public involvement process.
9. **Availability of Draft Planning Documents for Public Comment:**  
The MPO staff will make available copies of draft planning documents for public comment. These documents will be located in public facilities, primarily libraries located strategically throughout the Huntsville-Madison County area, as well as other locations that will facilitate input from a diverse segment of the community's population. Other facilities may include the Department of Parking & Public Transit, the Huntsville Housing Authority Offices, Community Recreational Centers, and other facilities identified by the MPO staff. The MPO staff will distribute draft planning documents for public comment for a minimum of 14 days. In instances where the final metropolitan transportation plan or TIP differ significantly from the version originally submitted for public review, another opportunity will be made available for public comment.
10. **Citizens' Advisory Committee:**  
Members of the Citizens' Advisory Committee are appointed by the elected officials that serve on the MPO Executive Committee. The objectives of this committee are listed on page 3. They provide valuable input to the planning process. This committee meets a minimum of four times a year and as often as required, to be presented and vote on the MPO staff's prepared transportation plans and amendments to other transportation planning documents. Public announcements of these meetings are made, inviting the participation of the general public in the meetings.
11. **Comment Forms:**  
Comment forms are the preferred way for the MPO to receive input pertaining to prepared transportation plans. Specialized forms will be created for each plan or issue requiring input. Comment forms will be made available to citizens at public involvement meetings and will accompany plans left at public facilities for review. Comment forms may be mailed in or handed in at the public involvement meetings. Additionally, comment forms may be received via the MPO's website once the procedures for doing so are established.

12. **Flyers:**

Flyers are used as one method to announce public involvement meetings and public hearings. Specifically, the flyers note the date, times, and location of the scheduled meetings. Flyers are currently distributed to locations where plans are left for public review.

**C. Public Involvement Policies and Objectives**

The overall goal of the local MPO is to provide the public with detailed information on transportation planning programs and project development in a convenient and timely manner. The MPO also has a commitment to consult with and coordinate with other pertinent agencies and organizations responsible for other types of planning activities that may be impacted by the adoption of the metropolitan transportation plan and/or TIP. These goals are realized through engaging the techniques previously identified, and incorporating them into the following specific MPO policies and objectives:

**Policy 1: The MPO will actively engage the public and appropriate agencies and organizations in the transportation planning process according to the policies contained in this Public Participation Plan, and in accordance with state procedures and federal law.**

Objective 1.1: The MPO will maintain an up-to-date database of contacts including at a minimum the following persons:

- a. Local elected officials
- b. Appropriate local government staff
- c. Local transportation agencies and other pertinent agencies/organizations responsible for planning activities that may be impacted by the adoption of transportation plans (such as transit, the Huntsville International Airport, etc.)
- d. Local broadcast and print media, including minority outlets
- e. Appropriate Madison County Library branches and other public facilities traditionally used for public display of plans
- f. Individuals interested in transportation planning activities, per their request

Objective 1.2: The MPO will, when feasible, mail meeting announcements to the MPO contact list for upcoming activities. It is preferred that these announcements be e-mailed.

Objective 1.3: The MPO will announce meetings on the local government cable television channel. This broadcast channel covers the communities of Huntsville and portions of Owens Cross Roads.

Objective 1.4: The MPO will conduct meetings in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and provide reasonable accommodations for the disabled community. The public involvement process, as required by federal legislation, must include a methodology of informing the physically disadvantaged segment of the population that would like to participate in the planning process. Public officials must be notified no later than seven (7) days prior to the date of the scheduled meeting so that officials may make special arrangements, if necessary, in order to facilitate their participation in the proceedings.

Objective 1.5: The MPO will contact appropriate agencies and organizations for consultation prior to adoption of the metropolitan transportation plan and the TIP. Refer to Policies 5 and 6 for additional information.

**Policy 2: The MPO will keep the public informed of on-going transportation related activities.**

Objective 2.1: The MPO will make all draft and final adopted publications and other appropriate documents readily available to the public via the internet, the MPO staff office (City of Huntsville Planning Division), and the main branch of the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library.

Objective 2.2: The MPO staff will be available to provide both general and project-specific information at the MPO staff offices during normal business hours and after hours at the request of groups, with reasonable notice.

Objective 2.3: The MPO will publish a quarterly newsletter (**Transportation Quarterly Review**) for distribution to the MPO contact list. Citizens may be added to the list upon request. The newsletter will include status reports and/or updates on current or recently completed projects, announcements of upcoming meetings or public hearings, and will include a list of authorized projects for the current fiscal year.

Objective 2.4: The MPO will maintain an internet website. The website will be updated as required to provide the most up-to-date information available.

The website, at a minimum, will contain the following information:

- a. Current MPO and advisory committee membership
- b. Meeting calendars and agendas
- c. Links to transportation plans and other MPO publications

Other transportation agencies, transportation related businesses, local governments, and interested groups will be encouraged to provide a link to the MPO website on their organization's website.



Objective 2.5: The MPO will, upon request and as feasible, provide information for inclusion in publications of various special interest groups that publish newsletters including, but not limited to homeowners and neighborhood associations, church groups, civic groups, and other community organizations.

**Policy 3: The MPO will utilize visualization techniques to effectively communicate the metropolitan transportation plan and TIP.**

Objective 3.1: Documents made available for public review and comment will include appropriate maps, photographs, and/or graphics to better communicate transportation planning goals and objectives.

Objective 3.2: Maps, photographs, and/or graphics depicting specific transportation projects and plans are readily available at the MPO office and will be used to discuss proposed transportation plans, projects, and initiatives to the visiting public.

Objective 3.3: The **Transportation Quarterly Review** newsletter may also include maps, photographs, and graphics as appropriate to clarify transportation planning goals and objectives.

Objective 3.4: Maps, photographs, and/or graphics related to transportation plans may be posted to the MPO's website, as appropriate and necessary.

Objective 3.5: Maps, photographs, and/or graphics related to the metropolitan transportation plan and TIP will be displayed and described during public meetings where the plans are being discussed, as appropriate.

**Policy 4: The MPO will encourage the involvement of all citizens within its jurisdiction, especially including those identified by FHWA as "traditionally underserved", in the transportation process [23 CFR 450.316(a)(1)(vii)]. The MPO will furthermore work towards ensuring the full and fair participation in the transportation decision making process by all potentially affected communities.**

Objective 4.1: The MPO will, whenever feasible, hold its public involvement meetings, at a location or locations convenient to potentially affected citizens, especially the traditionally underserved population. As mentioned previously, the MPO staff will make available copies of draft planning documents for public comment. These documents will be located in public facilities throughout the Huntsville-Madison County area, as well as other locations that will facilitate input from a diverse segment of the community's population. Other facilities may include the Department of Parking & Public Transit, the Huntsville Housing Authority Offices, Community Recreational Centers, and other facilities identified by the MPO staff. Additionally, the MPO will ensure that broadcast and print media outlets that serve primarily minority populations are included in media

releases concerning upcoming meetings and the distribution of plans for public comment. The staff may also use flyers as a method of public outreach to contact those traditionally underserved to advertise meetings and request comments pertaining to planning documents. Comments will be considered from all citizens, especially the traditionally underserved, in the planning process.

Objective 4.2: The MPO will use data obtained from the latest U.S. Census to determine areas with a concentration of minority or low-income populations. This data will be displayed in map format. The concentration of minority populations is determined by calculating the percentage of the population at the census block group level that exceeds the countywide average for the non-white population. The concentration of low-income populations is determined by calculating the percentage of the population that is at or below the poverty level at the census block group level that exceeds the countywide average for being at the poverty level.

Objective 4.3: The MPO will continue to promote diversity in the membership of its Citizen Advisory Committee. This will be done by encouraging the elected officials that make appointments to the committee, to select members that are of minority status and/or reside in areas that ensure geographic equitability among the membership.

**Policy 5: In developing the metropolitan transportation plan and TIP, the MPO will consult with other agencies, officials, and organizations responsible for other planning activities within the metropolitan planning area that are affected by transportation, or coordinate its planning process to the maximum extent practicable with such planning activities.**

Objective 5.1: The MPO will develop the metropolitan transportation plan and TIP with due consideration of other related planning activities within the metropolitan area, to include those agencies or organizations receiving federal funds for mass transportation services or other non-emergency transportation services, federal land highways, and federal public lands in accordance with 23 CFR 450.316(b).

Objective 5.2: The MPO will maintain a database of Federal, State, local, and non-profit agencies and organizations as indicated in Section III.B.2. of this document. The database will include agency or organization roles, responsibilities, and the key decision points for consulting with the agencies during metropolitan transportation plan and/or TIP development or update. These entities will be contacted so that plans, maps, and inventories, etc... developed by these agencies may be compared with the metropolitan transportation plan and TIP to ensure compatibility. Documentation of this process will be maintained to demonstrate who was contacted and how contact was made, responses received, results of comparison plans and programs, and how the information was used and its affect upon the metropolitan transportation plan or TIP development or update.

This documentation will be incorporated in the metropolitan transportation plan and TIP documents.

**Policy 6: In developing or updating the metropolitan transportation plan, the MPO will consult with appropriate agencies and organizations to identify potential environmental impacts and will consider how such impacts might be mitigated.**

Objective 6.1: The MPO will maintain a database of appropriate Federal, State and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation in accordance with 23 CFR 450.322(g). These agencies and organizations can assist in the identification of potential environmentally sensitive areas, environmental impacts, and mitigation strategies resulting from the development or update of the metropolitan transportation plan.

Objective 6.2: The MPO will consult with these agencies and organizations to determine environmentally sensitive areas in relation to transportation plans. The consultation will involve as appropriate, the comparison of transportation plans with State conservation plans or maps if available, and the comparison of transportation plans to inventories of natural or historic resources if available. Categories to be assessed may include historic sites and properties, protected lands, parks and landfills, topography, flood plains, wetlands, and other potentially environmentally sensitive areas.

Objective 6.3: The MPO will further assess the impacts upon the area if the plan is implemented, will work with identified agencies and organizations to define potential areawide mitigation measures that may be needed, determine if the identified mitigation could be achieved, and adjust the transportation plan if necessary to minimize or eliminate the environmental concern.

Objective 6.4: Documentation will be made of this process to demonstrate what agency or organization was contacted, the location of capacity or regionally significant projects within the metropolitan area boundary, a description or category of the environmental inventory (i.e., historic properties, wetlands, etc...), and the assessment of any likely impacts resulting from proposed improvements and potential mitigation measures. This documentation will be incorporated into the metropolitan transportation plan.

Objective 6.5: The MPO staff will assess each project identified for improvement in the metropolitan transportation plan and determine if improvements will be in the existing right of way, add capacity, or modify traffic patterns. If no significant impacts are determined, documentation should indicate such. If impacts are realized, then a discussion of potential environmental mitigation (addressing the human and natural environment) will be incorporated into the plan. The discussion will be developed in consultation with federal, state, and tribal land

management, wildlife, and regulatory agencies as appropriate, per 23 CFR 450.322(f)(7).

**Policy 7: The MPO will actively participate in public involvement activities for individual transportation improvement projects from the planning phase through construction and will actively participate in the public involvement efforts of other transportation-related government agencies and organizations.**

Objective 7.1: The MPO staff will assist, upon request, the Alabama Department of Transportation, local governments, and transportation agencies in the development and implementation of their public involvement techniques for planning and other studies.

Objective 7.2: The MPO staff will assist the Alabama Department of Transportation by attending State sponsored public involvement meetings within the MPO jurisdiction. Additionally, the MPO staff can assist citizens on a limited basis that call or visit the office with questions concerning specific transportation projects.

Objective 7.3: The MPO staff will assist the Alabama Department of Transportation in the coordination of the statewide transportation planning public involvement and consultation processes when requested.

Objective 7.4: The MPO staff will participate in and strive to coordinate its public involvement efforts with other transportation-related government agencies and organizations, especially the Huntsville Department of Parking and Public Transit.

**Policy 8: The MPO staff will provide feedback on public comments as required by federal legislation. Additionally, plans that have already been through the public involvement process; yet undergo major modifications, will go through the public involvement process again.**

Objective 8.1: When significant written and oral comments are received on the draft metropolitan transportation plan or TIP (including the financial plan) as a result of the public involvement process, a summary, analysis, and report on the disposition of comments shall be made a part of the final plan and TIP [23 CFR 450.316(a)(2)].

Objective 8.2: If the final metropolitan transportation plan or TIP differs significantly from the one which was made available for public comment by the MPO and raises new material issues which interested parties could not reasonably have foreseen from the public involvement efforts, an additional opportunity for public comment on the revised plan or TIP shall be made available [23 CFR 450.316(a)(1)(viii)].

**Policy 9: The MPO will work towards continually improving its public involvement practices.**

Objective 9.1: The MPO will continuously evaluate its public participation and involvement techniques, according to the procedures outlined in **Appendix A - Public Participation Evaluation Procedures.**

Objective 9.2: This PPP will be reviewed and adopted, with modifications if necessary, at least every three years.

#### **IV. REVISIONS AND AMENDMENTS**

This Public Participation Plan reflects the current procedures of the Huntsville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization. This plan will be reviewed every three years and revisions will be made if necessary. The Public Participation Plan will be reviewed by the MPO in terms of its effectiveness in assuring that the process provides full and open access to all. Plan revisions will be based upon evaluation of the techniques implemented for public involvement.

The MPO shall publish these procedures and provide 45 days for written public comment before adoption by the MPO. This action will be advertised in a newspaper of general circulation, including the locations where plans will be made available for review and comment. The same procedure shall be followed when the MPO makes revisions to this Public Involvement Plan.

This Public Participation Plan, dated February 27, 2008 supersedes the **Public Involvement Procedures for Transportation Planning in the Huntsville Urbanized Area**, previously approved by the MPO, dated August 24, 2005. The adoption of this plan is made possible through the adoption of Resolution 1-08, approved by the MPO on February 27, 2008.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT EVALUATION PROCEDURES**

Federal regulation 23 CFR 450.316(a)(1)(x) requires that the MPO evaluate the effectiveness of its public involvement program on a periodic basis. In evaluating its processes, the MPO may determine to no longer utilize techniques that are deemed ineffective, or to initiate the use of other innovative techniques that provide better response and more positive feedback. The purpose of this appendix is to establish guidelines for the evaluation of public involvement techniques identified in the **Public Participation Plan for Transportation Planning in the Huntsville Urbanized Area**.

This appendix will outline the steps to be taken to evaluate the identified public involvement techniques and will identify measures to quantify success rates and outline strategies to improve the MPOs' public involvement process.

#### **Evaluation Methods and Performance Goals**

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of public involvement tools identified in this document, methods need to be established to measure or gauge performance. The methods used for evaluating the performance of the public involvement techniques in this plan consist of surveys, quantitative analysis, and qualitative analysis. A definition of each of these methods is provided below. Additionally, **Table 1** lists each public involvement technique, along with performance goals and the methods for reaching those goals.

##### **Surveys**

Surveys can be conducted in person, by phone, by mail, or by e-mail. The selection of the best type and extent of survey for evaluation purposes is dependent upon the actual public involvement technique being evaluated. For example, persons may be asked if the meeting notices shown on the local government cable channel is an effective notification tool.

##### **Quantitative Analysis**

Quantitative analysis can be achieved through the use of statistics. For instance, the number of persons attending a public involvement meeting can be compared to the number of persons notified of the meeting.

##### **Qualitative Analysis**

Qualitative analysis is more objective. It deals primarily with MPO staff review of certain techniques, with improvements listed and/or changes proposed. Qualitative analysis can be used to evaluate web sites as well as the content of newsletters.

**TABLE 1**  
**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT/PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES EVALUATION**

<b>Public Involvement Tool</b>	<b>Performance Measure</b>	<b>Performance Goal</b>	<b>Actions to be Taken to Meet Goal</b>
Public Participation Plan	No measure used. The PPP should reflect the policies and preferences of the MPO.	None.	The PPP will be updated every three years, and will include the improvement strategies determined through public involvement evaluations.
MPO Website	Number of hits to site.	Minimum of 25 hits a quarter, with a goal of increasing hits by 3% per quarter.	Use other public involvement tools to promote the use of the website.
MPO Database	Number of returned mail items.	Maximum of 2% return rate per mailing.	Immediately correct database when mail is returned.
MPO Newsletter	Phone calls, letters, e-mails, number of returned newsletters.	Maximum of 2% return rate per mailing.	Continue providing information that gets favorable attention; correct or improve items that receive negative feedback.
Press Releases	Phone calls, letters, or e-mails from media or public.	None.	Keep media continually informed of meetings and opportunities for public input.
Legal Ads	Phone calls, letters, or e-mails from media or public.	None.	Provide plan review notices and meeting announcements to newspaper in timely manner, so the public can be effectively notified and the news media can highlight upcoming meetings and issues.
Cable TV Announcements	Phone calls, letters, or e-mails from public.	Minimum of 5% of public involvement meeting attendees/survey respondents in coverage areas indicate that they saw the meeting notice.	Provide plan review notices and meeting announcements to Mayor's office in timely manner, so announcements can be broadcast more frequently.
Project Specific Websites	Phone calls, letters, e-mails from public, number of site hits.	Minimum of 25 hits a month when used, with a goal of increasing hits by 3% over life of page.	Use other public involvement tools to promote the use of the website.



**TABLE 1**  
**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT/PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES EVALUATION**  
*(Continued)*

<b>Public Involvement Tool</b>	<b>Performance Measure</b>	<b>Performance Goal</b>	<b>Actions to be Taken to Meet Goal</b>
Project/Transportation Plan Open Houses	Phone calls, letters, or e-mails from media or public, attendance. (ALDOT sponsored meetings will not be evaluated by MPO staff.)	Minimum of 15 persons in attendance per meeting. (This goal may not be met, as the public tends not to attend involvement meetings en masse, even though meetings are widely advertised.)	Multiple meetings will be scheduled at times and locations convenient to public. Will use other public involvement tools to promote meeting locations, dates, and times.
Availability of Draft Planning Documents for Public Comment	Phone calls, letters, e-mails, comment sheets.	Number of persons returning comments concerning the plans.	Staff should monitor number of blank comment sheets left with plans at public facilities. Draft planning documents should be left at multiple central locations throughout the MPO study area.
Citizen Advisory Committee	Phone calls, letters, or e-mails from invitees.	N/A. These members are appointed by elected officials in the study area.	The MPO should encourage members to attend meetings. Elected officials should be encouraged to appoint citizens that promote racial, geographic, and economic diversity.
Comment Forms	Phone calls, letters, e-mails, number of responses.	60% of meeting attendees returned a form, or 20% of completed comment sheets were returned with plan left at public facilities.	Stress importance to citizens of receiving public comments. Use other public involvement tools to advertise locations of comment forms and desire to receive input.
Flyers	Calls, letters, e-mails, number of persons reached.	Minimum of 5% of meeting attendees indicate that they saw the meeting advertised via flyer.	Place public notices prominently on bulletin boards or other central locations offered by public facilities.

### **Improvement Strategies**

The Huntsville Area MPO strives to improve public participation through increasing public awareness and by improving upon the public involvement techniques highlighted in this

document. The decisions made by the MPO affect the residents of the community, and the public must be aware that their involvement is critical to the transportation planning process.

It is important that public involvement be evaluated, and its effectiveness measured. Utilizing the performance measures detailed in **Table 1** to evaluate each technique, and periodically testing its effectiveness is critical if public involvement is to be successful.

Within one month of completing a major public involvement process, the evaluation of techniques utilized in the process should be conducted. For on-going activities, such as internet websites and MPO newsletters, the evaluation should be performed semi-annually. **Attachment 1** provides a form to record the type of evaluation conducted. **Attachment 2** is provided as a template or guide for the evaluation process, and is used to record improvement strategies. Each time an evaluation is conducted, specific improvement strategies should be identified for implementation the next time the technique is employed. If an improvement is needed for a routine public involvement activity, such as the website or MPO newsletter, deadlines for implementing the improvement should be set.



**ATTACHMENT 2**  
**HUNTSVILLE AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY OF THE**  
**METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION EVALUATION**  
**IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES FORM**

Technique being Evaluated:
Date Evaluation Completed:
Recommended Improvement Strategies:
Date(s) of Implementation:

